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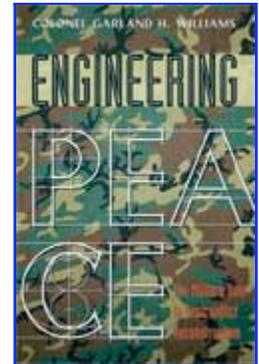
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Engineering Peace

The Transition from Relief to Reconstruction

By Courtney Rusin
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The day after the shooting stops, who can rebuild a bridge, repave a road, restart an electrical plant or rehabilitate a water treatment facility? In the aftermath of war, local capacity is often limited, international assistance takes months to arrive, and people who have suffered through years of conflict find themselves facing deprivation, isolation, and danger. Military engineers, whose primary responsibility during war is to serve military purposes, have the capacity in peacetime to alleviate suffering, jumpstart economic activity, and win hearts and minds.



Col. Garland H. Williams, USA, makes this argument in *Engineering Peace: The Military Role in Postconflict Reconstruction*. On the occasion of the book's publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace **hosted the author** and a distinguished panel to discuss the functional gap between the military-led peacekeeping mission and the civilian-led postconflict reconstruction effort. In addition to **Col. Williams**, a 2002-2003 Army Senior Fellow at the Institute, other panelists included Dana Eyre of USAID's Office of Iraq Reconstruction and Paul Hughes with the Peace and Stability Operations program at the Institute of Peace. Daniel Serwer, the Institute's Director of Peace and Stability Operations, moderated the session.

Drawing on the examples of Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, Williams outlined his proposal to expand the mandate of the military engineers in order to close the gap. The panel discussed this strategy and made additional recommendations toward achieving synergy between the military and civilian aspects of postconflict reconstruction. The following summary is based on their presentations and does not represent the views of the Institute, which does not take positions on policy issues.

Time is of the essence...

As illustrated in Iraq, the civilian population's support in the postconflict reconstruction effort is critical to achieving peace on the ground. Rebuilding social institutions and the physical infrastructure on which they are based in the period immediately following military combat operations offers the local population concrete evidence of progress as well as the incentive to support the international reconstruction effort, said Williams.

Short-term results, however, will only be sustainable if linked to long-term goals. Military engineering expertise available in the short-term could intersect effectively with longer-term civilian development plans by advancing necessary infrastructure repairs that will speed social, political and economic reconstruction. Williams argued that an expanded military peacekeeping mandate that deploys engineering brigades to provide emergency relief and reconstruction would, Williams argues, bridge the gap. That said, the military must execute the mandate in the context of long-term development goals and with the guidance of a political-military plan formulated at the interagency level. In other words, short-term outcomes, such as building a bridge or clearing a supply route, must be linked to long-term social, political, and economic goals. Initial reconstruction efforts should focus on those with a lasting impact, such as rebuilding the electrical grid, rather than quick, high-profile projects.

Military engineering capabilities should be used to their full potential...

Although the military's primary role following the end of combat operations is to establish and maintain a secure environment, the military also has the engineering means and technology to repair physical infrastructure damaged in conflict. Expanding a military peacekeeping contingent's mandate to include physical reconstruction projects that meet the broader needs of the civilian community would utilize this capacity to its full potential and reduce reconstruction time by almost a year, argued Williams. This will allow the necessary time for civilian relief agencies with comparable engineering expertise to deploy a process slowed by funding and organizational constraints. To expedite project approval and execution, the mandate must also give the engineering brigades the authority to make emergency assessments and contract with local workers to participate in the repairs.

The military has the command and control structure needed to execute projects efficiently, but capacity alone will not ensure a successful outcome. Physical infrastructure should be rebuilt within the context of peace operations and conflict transformation, suggested the panelists.

Reconstruction planning should begin by prioritizing projects that will strengthen and expedite the country's move from chaos to recovery vis-a-vis its own population and its neighbors in the region. To do so, priorities should be set that help establish a strong civilian networking capacity to maintain and expand the physical infrastructure that will serve as the backbone for an enduring peace. For instance, along with reconstructing the physical infrastructure, the following must be rehabilitated or developed within the citizenry: (1) the technical capacity to operate and maintain the country's infrastructure requirements; (2) the organizational forms to manage them efficiently; (3) the financial stability to recapitalize them as they degrade; (4) and the governance to regulate them. Existing local engineering capacity and resources should be used from the outset in order to build long-term capacity and empower the local community.

Improved coordination between the military and civilian agencies is critical...

Although the military-led reconstruction can lay the groundwork for the longer term civilian-led effort, a successful transition requires planning at the interagency level. The political-military plan of each intervention must articulate roles and be communicated down to the operational level. Williams recalls the shortcomings of civil-military coordination in Bosnia and Kosovo. In Bosnia, the NATO civil affairs unit (CIMIC) was established but operated without a civil-military plan, delaying its ability to make needs assessments on the ground until nine months after the end of the conflict. The situation improved in Kosovo because there was an approved plan, but it was not communicated down to the operating level so that it could be executed.

Williams proposes the formation of a standing interagency working group including government agencies, the military, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private contractors. With central control at either the State Department or the National Security Council, this working group would facilitate military and interagency coordination, build confidence among the actors, and integrate the short-term and long-term goals of reconstruction. Projects would then be executed without delay on a decentralized operational level.

Engineering Peace is Ultimately a Balancing Act...

A successful transition from relief to reconstruction is contingent upon balance. Short-term projects should initiate a long-term investment in the country's recovery. Only good advance planning will allow for the appropriate flexibility on the ground that meets the overall political goals of establishing peace and putting a country on the track toward good governance. Military and civilian agencies have complementary capacities and their roles must be balanced to achieve the best outcome, the panelists concluded.

Of Related Interest

[Engineering Peace: The Military Role in Postconflict Reconstruction](#)

Institute Event, May 2005 (Audio)

[*Engineering Peace: The Military Role in Postconflict Reconstruction*](#)

USIP Press Books, March 2005

[Training for Peace and Humanitarian Relief Operations: Advancing Best Practices](#)

This USIPeace Briefing was written by Courtney Rusin, Operations Coordinator in the Peace and Stability Operations program at the Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

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